Falacy of the "Miracle Man" in Baseball Progress

BY J. B. SHERIDAN.

THE "Miracle Man" is the greatest fallacy in baseball. Baseball reporters made this bogie. They take a simple, harmless individual, who manages to win a few games of baseball somehow, and call him a "Miracle Man." The bogie straightaway ge's a salary of anywhere from $12,000 to $50,000 a year, and believes he can make players out of punk and bricks without straw. Then he loses a couple of players, a pitcher or two breaks down on him, and, presto, he fails to terrify, falls down and disappears.

There is more money for doing less things in baseball than in any other occupation in the world. Men are getting $10,000 or $15,000 for seven months' work in baseball. That is to say, they manage ballplayers for two hours in the morning and for four hours in the afternoon for seven months in the year. Their board is paid at the best hotels half of these seven months.

Many men do more work for $1,500 a year or twelve months than baseball managers do in a year of seven months for $15,000.

There are thousands of men working in civil life, not to speak of army life, for $1,500 a year who can discount six of every eight managers in the major leagues of baseball, doing anything.

When an old player who has never been anything but a good bit of a plug cannot see or throw or hit or run any more for his $3,500 a year, he forthwith becomes a candidate for a managerial position at $10,000.

Case of One Man.

I know of a player who really never "located himself." That is to say, he was in the major leagues for fifteen years and enjoyed a large salary most of these years. He played, I think, less than eighty games to the year, though there are 154 games in the schedule. That means that he played about half the season. He managed to get himself quite a reputation as a batter, baserunner and fielder about 1905. On the strength of that reputation he got a good contract in 1906. He took great care of his bad legs, for his underpinning always was bad. He never was a good infielder or a good outfielder. He did hit now and then. He did run bases well one year. He was fast and he was a good talker. He got the ears of baseball reporters. That got him a good contract.

His manager was weary of him. He was not in the game enough to make him worth while. The fellow was always saving his legs and his averages. His manager was willing to trade him.

Another manager had seen the boy play a couple of good games. The player's reputation was good—in the newspapers. The second manager was eager to get the player. He talked trade to the first manager and got him.

The first thing the player did was to stick out for a three-year contract. He got that at good figures. He put every dollar he got in the bank and set out to save his legs and his batting and fielding average once more.

He had what is known as a "cast-iron" contract. Now, no contract is castiron, but some of them are meant to be so and look like they might be. Then it was hard to find efficient substitutes for this particular player.

Kept His Average Up.

He hung on during the years from 1905 to 1914, though he played an average of only one-half the scheduled games. He managed to keep his average up and to get good notices in the newspapers. "If Blank's knee would heal, the Methodists would win the championship!" was the cry of his home papers.

The year 1914 gave baseball players, especially of the "old spav" variety, a great opportunity. The Federal League came into the field and essayed to compete with the existing bodies, the National and American leagues. Players with half a name could get unthought-of sums to sign contracts. Mordecai Brown, who was a real pitcher, one of the truly great, got a three-year contract to manage the St. Louis Federal League team at $12,000 a season. Brown pitched some of the greatest baseball ever pitched in any league at any time for $4,500 a year.

Our especial player took the fullest advantage of the opportunity offered by the competition of the Federal League. He managed himself well. He traveled around the country from town to town offering his services to the highest bidder. He was done as a ballplayer, but in some way he managed to make people think he was a star.

The Federal Leaguers offered him large sums. He wanted an iron-bound contract for three years. He knew, better than anyone else, that his day was done.

The Federal Leaguers were wiser in their generation than some of the club managers of organized baseball. One of the greatest managers in the game outbid the Federal League for the services of this passe player. A three-year contract at $7,000 a year. The best year the player ever saw was worth about $4,500.

The man got his iron-clad contract with one of the biggest clubs in the game.

Still Is Angling.

I have not the guides at hand, but I am sure that he did not play twenty-five full games of baseball for his $21,000. His manager was compelled to pay $15,000 for a man to play his position in 1917.

This player got to the end of his playing rope this year. In fifteen years he had drawn $85,000 from baseball clubs. Yet he never was a real inflelder or a real outfielder.

Then he modestly admitted that he would be glad to consider an offer of $10,000 a year and a certain percentage of the profits to manage a major league club.

It is not by any means certain that he will not get that major league club and that magnificent stipend, too. He has accomplished much more wonderful things in the way of getting something for nothing in baseball.

And if he does succeed in getting $10,000 for seven months' work as a manager it is no cinch that he will not earn it fully as much as many managers who have preceded him.

Baseball is the only business in which you can consistently fail year after year yet grow rich.

I know a man who was engaged to manage a team in the American League during its organization period. He had been a famous player—justly so—in a certain town. The original promoters of the American League figured that he was popular in that particular town and that he might make a good manager.

He failed in that particular town. But he made a hit with the powerful promoters of the American League. When he failed in one city he was given a better managerial job in another city. After seven years' trial in that city he proved an utter failure once more. His employer liked him, but had to release him. The people would not have any more of his managing.

Again another managerial berth was found for him. Again he proved unsuccessful. Then a chance came to buy a great major league club. The manager had saved some money. He was given a chance to get in on the purchase of that major league club. Help was given him to get sufficient money to make the large purchase. He was elected president of the club. His team won a world's championship the first year he owned it. He made 150 per cent on his investment. Which was a dignified one.

Then he got into a wrangle with his backers and sold his interest in the club and quit the game a well-to-do man. He was worth possibly $5,000 when he became a manager. Ten years later he quit the game worth $150,000. Then he got in on some war babies and is now worth $250,000.

This clever fellow got rich by failing. He had the right backers, was in right. Every time he lost his job they got him a better job. Thrice he scored ignominious failures. The third failure resulted in boosting him into a fortune.

Another Failure.

I have in mind one great player, who has since got a reputation as a great manager. I saw him fail utterly with his first major league club. He went back to the minor leagues, made a good reputation by winning a pennant, and got another job managing a major league team. As luck would have it, the team had been built for him by the man who had failed. He won a championship in his first season. That gave him a reputation.

The strong team stuck and he won a couple of other league championships, but was always beaten in the world's championship. Yet year after year he is always up there. He got a couple of great players, and they have endured year after year. They make him a great manager.

Players make managers. Managers seldom make players. If the manager has ability to keep his players sober and in good humor and working together and gives them a clean scheme of ball, has any idea of his business, he will get the best possible result out of the players given him.

Has any team ever won a championship with a bad team?

I do not think so.

How many teams have won championships for bad managers?

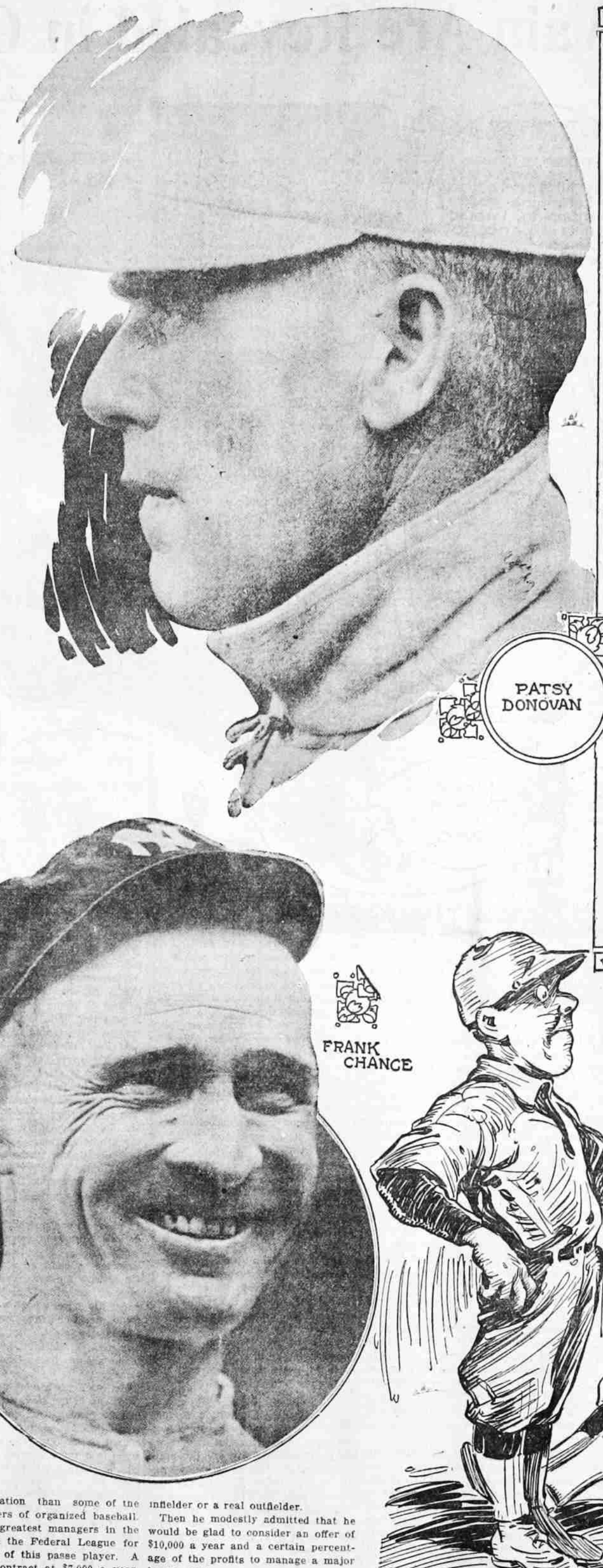
Many of them.

The team makes the manager. The first manager with a great reputation was Adrian C. Anson, manager of the Chicago White Stockings, 1877-97.

Anson was a truly great manager when he had Clarkson, McCormick, Corcoran, Hutchinson, Tener, Baldwin, etc., as pitchers, Kelly, Flint, et al. as catchers, Anson, Pfeffer, Williamson, Dahlen, Burns, Gore, Dalrymple as outfielders behind them. From 1877 to 1890 Anson was always one, two, three, first about five times, second thrice, third thrice, fourth once. Anson lost his stars in 1890. The best he did in the following seven seasons was fourth. He was eighth or ninth—it was a twelve-club league—much oftener than he was fourth or fifth.

Anson never could get going after he lost his cracks in 1890. He was given seven seasons to reorganize a winner, but failed to accomplish it.

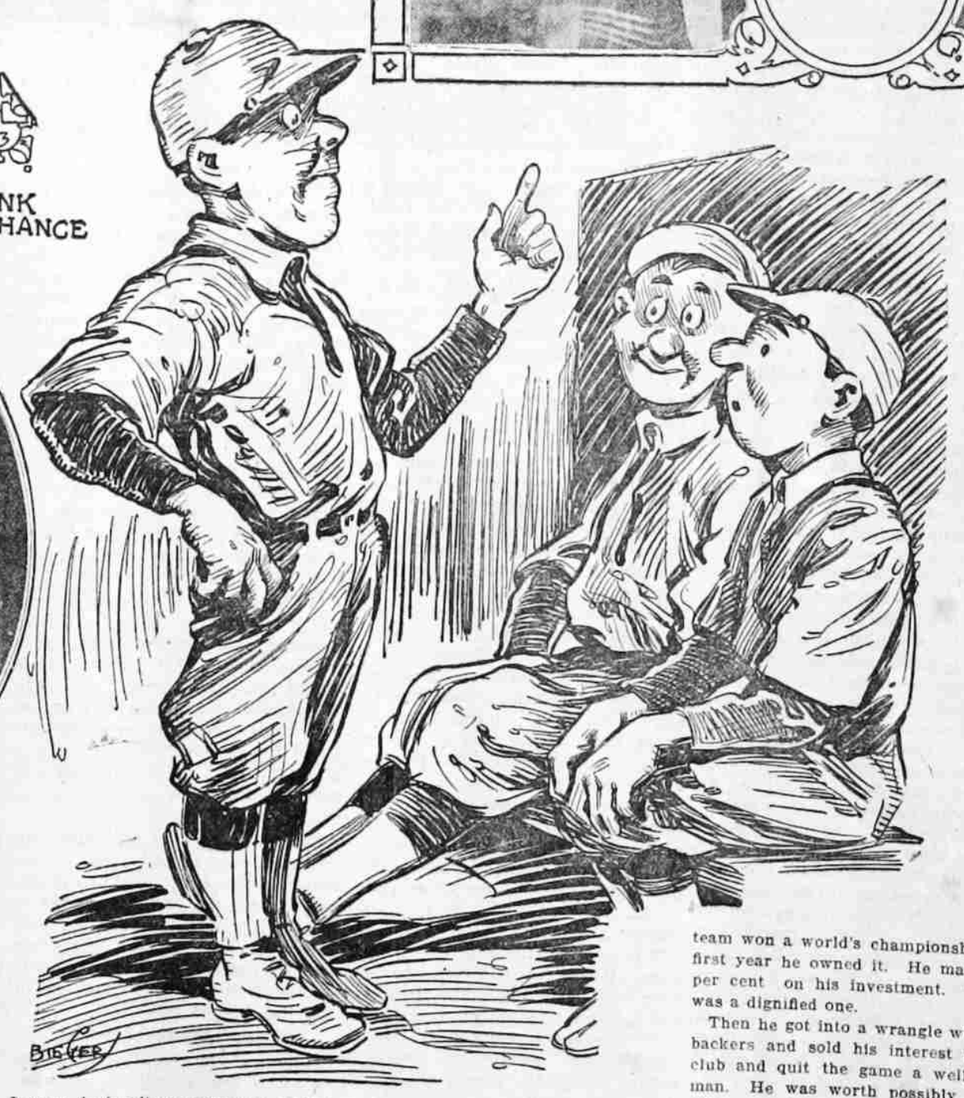
Was it Anson or his players that made the White Stockings famous for twenty years from 1877 to 1897?



PATSY DONOVAN

JAMES R. McALEER

FRANK CHANCE



The devil continues to do business at the old stand whether we are willing to give him his due or not.